promote Christian ideals for agriculture and rural life; to interpret the spiritual and religious values which re in the processes of agriculture and the relationships of rural life; to magnify and dignify the rural church; rovide a means of fellowship and cooperation among rural agencies: *Toward a Christian Rural Civilization.*"

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THE BIBLE AS A RURAL BOOK

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Among Christians today there is a wide-spread sense of humility and nitence. Few are the Christians who feel that we have done all we could to revent the tragic horror of the past seven years, or to present adequately ne saving Gospel of the Kingdom of God. Our sense of humility and a growing nviction of the urgency of the Gospel message are driving us again to the rd of God for guidance and basic convictions. Having lost our undue confi- ence in our own planning and skills, we return to the age-old wisdom of the ible. We are possessed with a new desire to know what God has revealed as is will. Among all Christians the return to the Bible is pronounced and ratifying.

We who serve and teach rural folk have an inestimable treasure in ne Bible, for it is predominantly a rural book. It contains the record of ne age-long religious quest of a pastoral and agricultural people. Many of ts choicest passages come from a rural setting and it contains the great rinciples through which alone rural living, or any other, can be ultimately ccessful, integrated and happy.

I. RURAL LIFE AND RELIGIOUS VALUES IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Dr. Julius A. Bewer has written a remarkable paper on "The Sig- ificance of Land in the Old Testament". (Christian Rural Fellowship Bulletin o. 35). In this bulletin he has pointed out the very close relationship of nd and religion among the Hebrews, the significance of the nature and loca- ion of the Chosen Land, the "land flowing with milk and honey", in which under ne guidance of God, the Chosen People worked out their destiny. It is clear s he so abundantly proves, that the Bible grew out of rural life.

In the very beginning of the story of man on the earth the sacred uthor maintains that God created man and placed him in the Garden of Eden to ress and keep it. (Gen. 2.15) God made the world but he needed a farmer to ake care of it. It has been so ever since. God has not stood aside to atch his beautiful world be ruined, but has raised up generation after genera- ion of farmers, shepherds, and herdsmen to dress and to keep his garden.

The Old Testament contains a number of beautiful and appreciative

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An address delivered at the Rural Church Life Conference, sponsored by the hio Council of Churches, Columbus, Ohio, March 18, 1946. Rev. Edward Krusen iegler is Professor of Bible at Manchester College. He is well known to embers of the Christian Rural Fellowship as author of internationally known ook RURAL PEOPLE AT WORSHIP. Used with the kind permission of Mr. Ziegler.

descriptions of the land and of the processes of rural life on the land. Perhaps the most notable descriptions of the Holy Land are found in two passages of Deuteronomy. In 8.7-14 is the description which sets forth most clearly the necessity of cooperation with God in caring for the lovely land into which He was bringing Hi people. In 11.9-17 points up again God's concern for the land. Note especially verses 10-12---*

> "For the land, whither thou goest in to possess it, is not as the land of Egypt, from whence ye came out, where thou sowedst thy seed, and wateredst it with thy foot, as a garden of herbs; but the land, whither ye go over to possess it, is a land of hills and valleys, and drinketh water of the rain of heaven, a land which Jehovah thy God careth for: the eyes of Jehovah thy God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year."

The Book of Psalms contains superb lyric descriptions of rural life, profound appreciation of the beauty of the country-side, and a sincere recognition of the power and glory of God in natural phenomena and the orderly succession of seed time and harvest. The tender beauty of Psalm 23; the magnificent march of a thunder storm across the hills of Judea in Psalm 29; the joyous songs of the harves festival in Psalm 65 and 67; the ascription of praise and thanksgiving even to the heavens, the seas and the forests, the assurance that even the beasts and birds are capable of worship, that the forces and elements of nature each in his own tongue can praise the Almighty as found in Psalm 148; and finally the magnificent nature poem, Psalm 104, which portrays God's care and provision for all His creation --- these are but a few of the choicest passages in the Hymnal of an agricultural peopl who recognize their dependence on a bountiful and provident Lord.

The effect of the land upon the people of Israel and upon their religion is beyond description. The gradual change from a nomadic to an agricultural econom inevitably had a large effect upon religious life and practice. As the people settled on the land, and in the course of centuries built stable homes upon it, planted and cultivated fields, vineyards and orchards, the temptation to discard the strong ethical worship of Jehovah and supplant it with the enervating, licentious rites and fertility cults of Baal worship, was almost overpowering. Time after time the people did fall into idolatry, only to be recalled by the stern challenge of the prophets. A more subtle trend was to take over some of the features of Baal worship into the worship of Jehovah. Prophetic religion was always keenly alert to these dangers and kept before the people the ideal of pure spiritual worship, and a strong sense of moral responsibility to a righteous God. This sense of ethical responsibility operated in the field of human relationships and the relationship of man to the land.

However, the Hebrews were able to take over from their early neighbors certain practices and in a sense baptize them for use in the worship and service of God. They took over some of the great festivals and gave them historical significance in addition to the rootage which they already had in the countryman's year. They took over the festival of unleavened bread in which God was recognize as the owner of the fields and the grain produced in them. They combined this emphasis with the celebration of their miraculous deliverance from Egypt and calle

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; the Passover.

"but at the place which Jehovah thy God shall choose, to cause his name to dwell in, there thou shalt sacrifice the passover at even, at the going down of the sun, at the season, that thou camest forth out of Egypt. And thou shalt roast and eat it in the place which Jehovah thy God shall chose: and thou shall turn in the morning, and go unto thy tents. Six days thou shalt eat unleavened bread; and on the seventh day shall be a solemn assembly to Jehovah thy God; thou shalt do no work therein." (Deut. 16.6-8)

ıey took the feast of weeks which celebrated in religious observance the ripen-
ıg of the first wheat, and filled it with the religious idea of communion with God.

"And thou shalt keep the feast of weeks unto Jehovah thy God with a tribute of a freewill-offering of thy hand, which thou shalt give, according as Jehovah thy God blesseth thee: and thou shalt rejoice before Jehovah thy God, thou, and thy son, and thy daughter, and thy man-servant, and thy maid-servant, and the Levite that is within thy gates, and the sojourner, and the fatherless, and the widow, that are in the midst of thee, in the place which Jehovah thy God shall choose, to cause his name to dwell there. And thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in Egypt: and thou shalt observe and do these statutes." (Deut. 16.10-12)

ıe festival of tabernacles or booths was also taken over and in place of the votive
fferings brought by pagans to Baal, they lifted up the work of their hands in joy-
ıs worship of the Lord their God.

"Thou shalt keep the feast of tabernacles seven days, after that thou hast gathered in from thy threshing-floor and from thy winepress: and thou shalt rejoice in thy feast, thou, and thy son, and thy daughter, and thy man-servant, and thy maid-servant, and the Levite, and the sojourner, and the fatherless, and the widow, that are within thy gates. Seven days shalt thou keep a feast unto Jehovah thy God in the place which Jehovah shall choose; because Jehovah thy God will bless thee in all thine increase, and in all the work of thy hands, and thou shalt be altogether joyful." (Deut. 16. 13-15)

t is clear that the Hebrews reinterpreted these agricultural festivals and made
hem not only celebrations of the providence of God in sending fruitful seasons,
ıt memorials of the great events of their pilgrimage.

One of the prophets even points out that God was their teacher of agricul-
ıre. See Isaiah 28.23-29---

"Give ye ear, and hear my voice; hearken, and hear my speech. Doth he that ploweth to sow plow continually? doth he continually open and harrow his ground? When he hath levelled the face thereof, doth he not cast abroad the fitches, and scatter the cummin, and put in the wheat in rows, and the barley in the appointed place, and the spelt in the border thereof? For his God doth instruct him aright and doth teach him. For the fitches are not threshed with a sharp, threshing instrument, neither is a cart wheel turned about upon the cummin; but the fitches are beaten out with a staff, and the cummin with a rod. Bread grain is ground; for he will not be always threshing it: and though the wheel of his cart and his horses scatter it, he doth not grind it. This also cometh forth from Jehovah of hosts,

who is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in wisdom."

Throughout the Old Testament the importance of the land to the nation, the family, and the individual are unmistakable. One of the major principles of their life on the chosen land is that of stewardship of the Holy Earth. Over and over again God is recognized as the owner. The opening stanza of the great festal hymn in Psalm 24 is a summary statement of their philosophy of relation to the earth,

> "The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof;
> The world and they that dwell therein:
> For He hath founded it upon the seas
> And established it upon the floods."

The cattle on a thousand hills were His. The silver, the gold, the mighty cedars of Lebanon, the Jordan and all of the brooks and springs, even the people who farme the land and herded the flocks, all belong to the Lord.

One of the great principles of their corporate life was that family prope must be kept in the family. The laws of inheritence as codified in the book of Numbers make this obligation clear. Girls who inherited land were required to mar within the father's tribe so that the land should not pass out of the ownership of that tribe. One of the most significant stores in Old Testament history regarding the use of land is that of Naboth's vineyard which was coveted and taken by King Ahab (I Kings 21). In this passage the voice of the prophet for a just and godly use and distribution of the land is first heard. The protest of Elijah sets forth clearly the will of God. Even before the time of Elijah, the prophet Samuel lift up his voice to tell the people of the danger that a monarch would take the land to give to his favorites. In a portentous warning, he told the people who wanted a ki of the grave dangers of conscription, taxation, and confiscation of land.

> "And he said: This will be the manner of the king that shall reign over you: he will take your sons, and appoint them unto him, for his chariots, and to be his horsemen; and they shall run before his chariots; and he will appoint them unto him for captains of thousands, and captains of fifties; and he will set some to plow his ground, and to reap his harvest, and to make his instruments of war, and the instruments of his chariots. And he will take your daughters to be perfumers, and to be cooks, and to be bakers. And he will take your fields, and your vineyards, and your oliveyards, even the best of them, and give them to his servants. And he will take the tenth of your seed, and of your vineyards, and give to his officers, and to his servants. And he will take your men-servants, and your maid-servants, and your goodliest young men, and your asses, and put them to his work. He will take the tenth of your flocks: and ye shall be his servants." (I Samuel 8.11-17)

The prophet Isaiah protested against the concentrated ownership of land which was enriching the landlords at the expense of the poor farmers.

> "Woe unto them that join house to house, that lay field to field, till there be no room, and ye be made to dwell alone in the midst of the land! In mine ears saith Jehovah of hosts, Of a truth many houses shall be desolate, even great and fair, without inhabitant." (Isaiah 5.8-9)

Probably the most vigorous opponent of the alienation of land was the farmer-prophet Micah. He could see no good in urban life. He thought that the cities, especially Samaria and Jerusalem, not only breed sin but are themselves dar

cots on the national life.

"For the transgression of Jacob is all this, and for the sins of the house of Israel. What is the transgression of Jacob? is it not Samaria? and what are the high places of Judah? are they not Jerusalem? (Micah 1.5)

: cried out in anguish and angry protest against the landlords and robbers of the oor.

"Woe to them that devise iniquity and work evil upon their beds! when the morning is light, they practise it, because it is in the power of their hand. And they covet fields, and seize them; and houses, and take them away; and they oppress a man and his house, even a man and his heritage. Therefore thus saith Jehovah: Behold, against this family do I devise an evil, from which ye shall not remove your necks, neither shall ye walk haughtily; for it is an evil time. In that day shall they take up a parable against you, and lament with a doleful lamentation, and say, We are utterly ruined: he changeth the portion of my people: how doth he remove it from me! to the rebellious he divideth our fields." (Micah 2.1-4)

Jeremiah's interest in the ownership of land is shown in a remarkable incient. When the fortunes of Judah seemed to be at their lowest ebb and no one had ny confidence in the future, when one could have bought Jerusalem for a song, eremiah bought a parcel of land near his old home at Anathoth as a symbol of confience in the future of the land. (Jer. 32.6-15)

Concern for the land itself is clearly shown in a number of passages. In eviticus 27.1-7 and Exodus 23.11 the idea of a Sabbatical year for the land in order o restore its fertility is set forth.

"but the seventh year thou shalt let it rest and lie fallow, that the poor of thy people may eat: and what they leave the beast of the field shall eat. In like manner thou shalt deal with thy vineyard, and with thy oliveyard." (Ex.23.11)

A remarkable concept of some of the prophets is that the land itself could e defiled by the sins of the people. It is doubtful whether the Hebrews really nderstood what the prophets meant. To them defilement meant ceremonial uncleaness but they probably did not see that the sins of grief, exploitation, both of atural resources and of persons, will inevitably result in economic and spiritual isaster. But this is what happened, Jeremiah points out in Jer. 2.7 that the land as defiled and made an abomination when it might have been a land of plenty and oodness. The most notable passage in this connection, however, is Isaiah 24.3-6—

"The earth shall be utterly emptied, and utterly laid waste; for Jehovah hath spoken this word. The earth mourneth and fadeth away, the world languisheth and fadeth away, the lofty people of the earth do languish. The earth also is polluted under the inhabitants thereof; because they have transgressed the laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore hath the curse devoured the earth, and they that dwell therein are found guilty; therefore the inhabitants of the earth are burned, and few men are left." (Isaiah 24.3-6)

In Isaiah 24.16-20 it is suggested that even earthquakes are the result of an's treachery to God and his creation.

In many passages it is made clear that the prosperity of Israel was deendent upon right use of the land. Many of the great Messianic hopes and the lorious dreams of the Golden Age were bound up in the welfare of the land. Micah

foresaw the day when every man should sit in peace under his own vine and fig tree, with none to make him afraid. (Micah 4.4) Amos in a glowing picture of the golden age to come speaks of a time when the harvests will be speeded up and the land shal be restored.

> "Behold, the days come, saith Jehovah, that the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed; and the mountains shall drop sweet wine, and all the hills shall melt. And I will bring back the captivity of my people Israel, and they shall build the waste cities, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and drink the wine thereof; they shall also make gardens, and eat the fruit of them. And I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be plucked up out of their land, which I have given them, saith Jehovah thy God. (Amos 9.13-15)

The Old Testament position on the use of land seems clear from these and many other significant passages. When God made the earth he looked upon it and sa that it was very good. (Gen. 1.31) The earth was given to man to be his home. He was to dress it and keep it, not exploit it. It was given him as a sacred trust to be cared for with appreciation and handed on from generation to generation with undiminished fertility. Upon it men were to live at peace with each other, sharing the good gifts which it gave in response to their labor, and worshipping the good God who had made it and was their heavenly landlord. It was a beautiful, bountiful fertile and kindly earth and if men used it rightly it would provide for all their physical needs. If men lived upon it in full recognition of their stewardship, th dependence upon God, and their interdependence upon one another, none need ever starve, and all might have room to live in peace and rear their little ones in security.

II. RURAL LIFE VALUES IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Almost as much as in the Old Testament, the rich life and teaching of the New Testament grew out of rural life. Three-fifths of the parables and many of th finest sayings of Jesus came out of rural life and experience. Humanly speaking, Jesus was a country carpenter who lived all of the happiest days of his life among rural people. It was from among them, farmers, fishermen and small town businessme that he called his disciples, and it was among them that he served; healing, teachi preaching and recalling men to God.

How one's mind kindles as he thinks of the possibilities of preaching to rural folk using the references of Jesus to country life! Consider the parable of sower of tares growing among the wheat, of a run-away boy feeding swine, of vineyar and fig trees; think of his teachings about sunsets, clouds, sparrows, lillies, storms, fish, sheep, grapes, and farmers. Where in all the world's literature can rural minister find so much kindling for the flames of his spirit as in these teachings of the Master?

There is an illuminating contrast between Jesus and St. Paul in the imagery, figures of speech, and place given to rural life and values, in their respective teachings. St. Paul, impressed by the tremendous urgency of getting the gospel as rapidly as possible into the whole Roman world had no time for rural peop and the peaceful, sluggish country-side. He was a city man himself, born and bred in Tarsus, educated in Jerusalem. His restless passion for the conversion of mank led him to Antioch, to Listra, to Iconium, and Derbe, to Philippi, Athens and Corin to Ephesus and at last to the Eternal City of Rome itself. Probably Paul's strate was the best for its time, but what would have happened had he at some period of hi life deserted the city and gone out into the rural areas? Would a church with dee roots in the soil have been able to withstand the enervating influences of

ıeological controversies, and at last the explosive invasion of Islam?

Paul's references to rural life are not always happy. His best illus-
rations grew out of the law courts, the market place, and the battlefield. He did
ention oxen, citing the humane provision of the Mosaic law that oxen should not be
ızzled when they worked on the threshing floor. But Paul, not understanding the
eeds of oxen, misunderstood, and insisted that it was only allegory. He spoke once
f grafting, but it does not seem clear that he knew the process too well. His
ppiest reference to rural life is II Corinthians 9.10 ---

"And he that supplieth seed to the sower and bread for food, shall supply and multiply your seed for sowing, and increase the fruits of your righteousness:"

Next to the teachings of Jesus himself, the book which contains the best
eferences to agricultural life and the most metaphors from agriculture is the book
f James. Almost every other verse in the book contains some reference to fields,
lowers, sunlight, fruit, rain and many other matters which country folk can well
nderstand. It is a book of hard-working, everyday, down-to-earth religion.

The great principles of New Testament religion are eternally applicable
o rural life.

1. Appreciation of the earth as man's God-given home. This principle is carried over complete and unaltered from the Old Testament.

2. A complete and unselfish stewardship of the earth and all its gifts. Jesus' finest statement on this principle is in his parable of the rich and foolish farmer told in Luke 12:16-21---

"And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: and he reasoned within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have not where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, be merry. But God said unto him, Thou foolish one, this night is thy soul required of thee; and the things which thou has prepared, whose shall they be? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

3. The great value of human personality to be looked upon by every child of God with respect, concern, and self-denying love.

4. Emphasis upon the family. It is recognized throughout the New Testament that the family is the basic unit in religious life. The kind of family life portrayed in the New Testament becomes exceedingly difficult in the city. It is the rural home which can best provide the setting for the Christian family.

5. Emphasis upon the use of the gifts of the earth as instruments of brotherhood. In that great passage on the last judgment in Matthew 25 the ultimate test of man's religion is shown to be his expression of loving concern in the giving of food and water of fellowship and campassion to his

fellowmen in need.

6. The redemption which Christ came to bring includes not only sinful and lonely men but the earth which is their home.

CONCLUSION

The Bible is not a book for any one class or any one people alone. It brings help and guidance, the revelation of the eternal purposes of a righteous and loving God to all sorts and conditions of men. But it speaks with peculiar force, relevance and interest to the condition of rural people, for it grows out o rural life. It deals with the great elemental truths. It gives light and visio for our own time and people, and suggests the solutions to our problems as rural folk out of a wealth of common background and through the inspired lips of great men and women whose feet were on the soil and who walked with the Almighty in his garden in the cool of the day.

The Bible is our most powerful ally in the teaching of stewardship of th holy earth. It is our finest textbook of conservation. It gives us our clearest guidance in the field of human relationships, which is the ultimate problem rural workers face. A return to the use of the Bible will greatly strengthen and enric devotion to the land, stewardship, the fellowship of rural Christian folk and thei sense of kinship with God the creator and father. It will restore to us all the kindly assurance that the Christ of the Country Road is walking by our side.

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